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ORDU ON THE BLACK SEA

Vartiter Kotcholosian Hovannisian

This photographic essay is based on my first exploration of the Armenian homeland, combined with archival materials and eyewitness accounts of survivors of the Armenian Genocide.* The *Aghet/Mets Eghern* (Calamity/Great Crime) erased an entire people from its native soil. The next targeted victim became the historical record and memory itself. Nonetheless, the salvaged remnants of the nation, internalizing their deep wounds, labored to revive their intrinsic way of life in far-flung lands. It was up to subsequent generations, the inheritors of the trauma continuously renewed by denial, to solidify the revitalization of national culture.

Unfortunately, even after the dislocations caused by the genocide, new Armenian migrations were triggered by destabilizing crises such as the Stalin Terror and internal mass deportations of Soviet nationalities; Hitler's inferno and *Deutschland über Alles*; the perennial turmoil and superpower rivalries in the Middle East; the devastating Armenian earthquake in December 1988; the massive flight of more than 200,000 Armenian inhabitants of Azerbaijan and other parts of the Caucasus between 1988 and 1991; the disintegration of the USSR; and the social and economic collapse that enervated most of the post-Soviet states. These constant migrations beyond the bounds of historic Armenia have modulated into a formidable contemporary "Diaspora without Frontiers" and a politically blockaded, geographically truncated Republic of Armenia as the successor of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic.

* I am grateful to those who contributed to this chapter by sharing their personal experiences and revealing their inner worlds and to those who provided photographs and bibliographic materials. Mark Gulezian kindly reproduced several of the photographs of Ordu. The incessant quest for justice of my sister, Nazik Kotcholosian Messerlian, reinforced my own effort to engage and preserve memory. The invaluable Armenian oral history collection at UCLA has provided the basis for presenting the personal accounts of the four survivors included in this essay.

The immediate link in this writer's transgenerational/trans-territorial lineage is a bright-eyed six-year old girl by the name of Khngeni (Incense Tree), born in Ordu on the Black Sea. She somehow survived the bloodbath of 1915 and thereby unknowingly contributed to the transmission of the legacy of her ancient people.

Homeland-Bound (Tebi Ergir)

In the summer of 1995, a group of Californians—professionals and educators—set out with skilled tour organizer Armen Aroyan to find their parents' or grandparents' ancestral homes. Heirs, turned tourists, with reverence and pain, viewed the centuries-old architectural marvels, majestic even in their present desecrated state—yearning all the way for living connections. In towns and villages, they asked the elders, who knew all too well, and the younger ones, who were taught otherwise. They searched in the familiar innocence of children's eyes and voices. The sixteen-day journey took them from Istanbul (Constantinople) across central Anatolia to the capital, Ankara, through Cappadocia, and then into historic Greater Armenia (Mets Hayk). In the process they did find their hearths, whether intact or in ruin, occupied or neglected, or even vanished.

Before proceeding to the Black Sea-Pontus region, the group had come face to face with the places where Armenians had lived for centuries: Ismid, now Izmit; the barely identifiable vestiges of the famed Armash Monastery; Kesaria/Kayseri with its former Armenian settlements; Zeitun; Gurun; Malatia; Kharpert with its numerous villages of the "Golden Plain"; Lake Tsovk/Geoljuk; Mush; Van—Akhtamar, Varagavank, Bergri/Muradiye Falls; the River Arax; Mount Ararat of the twin peaks; Kars, and Ani; then backtracking to Sarikamish and Erzerum with its highland plain fanning out toward the north; Terjan/Mamakhatun; Erznka (Erznka)/Erzinjan; Baberd (Papert)/Baiburt. The hinterland was rugged and primitive, with ruins dotting the landscape.

On the way north from the historic Armenian Highland to the Pontus, the city of Gumushkhane turned out to be a post-1915 settlement. The original town, perched high in the hills, was virtually obliterated. The bus driver skillfully navigated the neglected dirt road into the panoramic hills where ruins of large churches stood in silence. A professor from Istanbul, hiking with his young son, identified the sul-

len shells as Greek and Armenian monasteries. Being matter of fact about 1915, he felt it was time to acknowledge the truth.

Toward the Sea

The oppressive cloak of reigning injustice notwithstanding, an unexplainable sense of exaltation and anticipation seized my sister Nazik and me as we set out in search of our mother's shattered childhood. Traversing the Pontic Mountain range, we slowly made our way up a winding road that passed through nature's picturesque green wonderland. There, we admired nestled high on misty cliffs the now-abandoned but recently renovated twelfth-century Greek Monastery of Sumela, carved out of the face of the mountain and now a popular and lucrative tourist attraction.

Descending to the Black Sea littoral, we viewed a picture postcard come alive, the impressive port and city of Trabzon (Trebizond; Armenian: Trapizon or Trabizon). The city's center, where older structures were giving way to modern facades, boasted an abundance of mosques that periodically emitted loudspeaker calls to prayers—a reverberating dissonance on the backdrop of the erased cosmopolitan history and silenced churches. The official tourist literature and maps occasionally make mention of a Greek relic but nothing Armenian.

As if to comfort our unspoken exasperation, the bus driver negotiated a narrow winding mountainous passage in the eastern suburbs to the remnants of the Amenaprkich (All Savior) Monastery known locally as Kaymakli. Perched high above the city, this Armenian monastic complex is now scarcely a shadow of what it had been, the bare weathered church having survived as a storage space for hay. A sapling green tree stood upright on the flattened roof in the place of the long-gone cross.

Descending toward the city through the bountiful garden suburbs once inhabited by Armenians all conjured up deep emotions. So did the dark foreboding waters of the Black Sea, clearly visible from the terrace of the Trabzon Museum, housed in the majestic erstwhile Greek Cathedral of Saint Sophia. Another sadly redeeming experience was the unexpected discovery of fragments of Armenian-engraved tombstones, captioned as “Kaymakli”—randomly placed in the museum's garden.

Leaving behind Trabzon with its bountiful filbert (hazelnut) groves, the source of livelihood of many Pontic Greeks and Armenians, we

traveled west on a paved scenic coastal highway near fields of corn entwined in a symbiotic relationship with the embracing green stems of the interspersed string-bean stalks, about which Khngeni often spoke. Impatient and anxious, we reached Ordu, the place of our proud maternal ancestral lineage, before resuming our odyssey to Samsun then southward into historic Armenia Minor—Amasia, Marsovan, Gumushhajikoy—and on to Bolu, Adabazar, and Istanbul.

Ordu was the birthplace of Khngeni in 1909 and her lively younger brother Hovannes in 1911. In 1915, when they were just six and four years old, they were to be torn away from their family. Their staying alive came at an immeasurable price of extreme dehumanization and a precarious shifting existence in the years to come. They sometimes asked if it would have been more merciful or moral to have been drowned along with the countless other children in the angry waters of the Black Sea or to have perished with loved ones on the death marches into the interior.

Ordu—Before 1915

Ordu, a panoramic seaside town situated almost midway between Samsun in the west and Trebizond in the east, had been the seat of one of the districts of the Trebizond *vilayet*. The Armenians of the town originally lived in the lofty heights of Boz Tepe, which later served as a recreation/picnic area for the townspeople. The well-established Armenian sector was situated high up on the westerly slopes, running into the Greek quarter below, while the Turkish quarters extended easterly down to the seaside flats and government buildings and market place, where during business hours the menfolk of all ethno-religious groups intermingled.

Armenians played a significant role in the economy. They made up the majority of the artisans and craftsmen—shoemakers, carpenters, blacksmiths, coppersmiths, goldsmiths, textile workers, bakers—and they competed with the Greeks in commerce. In the latter part of the eighteenth century, filbert saplings were introduced from Trebizond and Girason (Giresun). The filbert industry quickly flourished, the product becoming the region's chief export, augmenting Ordu's prosperity. Moreover, construction of the Ordu-Sebastia (Sivas) overland road in the 1880s led to an economic boom and the influx of many Armenians from the Sebastia region.

In contrast with the geographically isolated regions of the Armenian Highland, the Black Sea Armenians had an advanced lifestyle, without compromising their ancient traditions. Yet state regulations and customary practices imposed strict limitations on the infidel *giavurs*. Periods of relative calm were interrupted by times of repression, unequal taxation, and even usurpation of goods and properties.

As in all Armenian communities, school and church were the focus of cultural life in Ordu. In the center of the Armenian quarter called Zeitun was the Surb Astvatsatsin (Holy Mother of God) church. Adjacent to the church was a large three-storey stone edifice housing a kindergarten through eighth-grade co-educational school, having earned the reputation of being one of the most efficient and progressive schools of the Armenian Pontus. A dedicated board of trustees and teaching staff oversaw the education of some 350 students. They could not have known, of course, that this cradle of enlightenment would soon be converted into an orphanage for some of the parentless children who survived the calamity of 1915. At present, the building is still being used as a school, even if for Turkish children alone.

Ordu, 1995

The moment of touching the reality had arrived. Suspended in a state of surreal trepidation at the gateway to the sanctuary—the altar of embracing one's wholeness—the bus rolled effortlessly into a typical seaside resort town, busy with its daily routines. Our driver, Jemal, quickly located the Toroman pharmacy, from where a physician brother and pharmacist sister had for years served the health needs of the area. That day the vivacious pharmacist guided us into the town's past. The last Armenian master coppersmith's door was locked. No sign of Armenian or Greek life. Uncounted young infidels had been absorbed without a trace into the local Islamic tapestry.

Our local guide pointed out identifiable Armenian structures. On the western slopes, surrounded by old houses, stood the silenced, now cross-less Greek church. Climbing steep passages we entered the former Armenian neighborhood, in the center of which stand trophies of a way of life prior to 1915. First is the three-storey school. Having housed an American-supervised orphanage after World War I, it later reverted to a school building. The friendly young Turkish principal took us on a tour—everything was so familiar. The second trophy, the Armenian church, has been replaced by a mosque. On the contiguous

stone wall, now crumbling, prayer rugs were draped, harmonizing with nature's green and the sun. We were unable to find the location of the Armenian Protestant church (*zhoghovaran*), which reportedly ministered to nearly a thousand *parishioners*.

We walked the Armenian neighborhood streets. Forlorn, benumbed, our eyes penetrating the neglected and the stately homes, striving to detect a viable connection. Eureka! We found it—Khngeni's early childhood castle.

This narrative also touches on some of the dynamics of dealing with the unsettled effects of the Armenian Genocide as they continue to impact diasporan descendants decades after the crime. The fortuitous, seemingly miraculous, preservation of some family photographs empowers the progeny to realize the quintessence of their proud, productive, yet mercilessly violated forebears.

The Human Factor in Perpetuity

Individual, variously motivated acts of intervention and rescue in the face of significant risk paradoxically represent the altruistic component in the atrocious record of genocide. Placed in historical context, the intercession by non-Armenians living under the watchful eyes of officials and agents of the Young Turk regime became a critical link in the chain of survivability of a condemned people. While nothing could save most of the Armenian leaders and menfolk, there were both Greeks and Muslims who harbored Armenian women and children. The heart-wrenching, ever-haunting experiences of the survivors were in a sense tempered by having been rescued, even for a brief time, by forthcoming individuals—be they Turk or Greek, and, during the death marches, by Kurd, Arab, or Bedouin. Survival is the springboard of revival. And so it was that the bewildered Khngeni and her brother Hovannes survived apart from one another in a series of Greek and Muslim households until the end of World War I when a now unfamiliar (and for Hovannes even an unwanted) hand of a relative came to fetch them. But the war's end did not bring peace for long as partisans of Mustafa Kemal, such as Topal Osman, wreaked havoc among the surviving Christian population, ultimately scattering even the dispossessed orphans into a global "Diaspora sans frontières."

Family life, now transnational, was eventually reassembled as the orphans came of age and found their mates in many different countries, even as picture brides in trans-Atlantic arrangements. For the most

part, traditional unspoken affection, emotional restraint, and persistent labor became the benchmarks of the survivor generation. During extensive travels in the United States and abroad, I interacted with many of these survivors and their families. The aged men and women had stoically internalized their unhealed wounds, and most of them had fastidiously spared their offspring the details and scope of their torment, yet in their sunset years the wounds seemed to resurface accompanied by agonizing frustration.* The inhuman wall of institutionalized denial deprived them of the opportunity to learn what happened to lost children or siblings or to express gratitude to their rescuers.

Several of 800 recorded interviews with survivors in the UCLA Armenian Oral History program have been utilized in this essay. They are presented below in condensed form in order to capture their essence. Obviously, summarizing in English translation very personal, emotion-filled narratives strips the original spoken word of much of its quality—dialect, diction, intonation, and even quivering hesitation. The interviewees were advanced in years when they were asked to share their indelible memories of their tender youthful years. They are the children of Ordu on the Black Sea:

Khngeni Kalenjjan - born 1909

and Hovannes Kalenjjan - born 1911

Shnorhig Teknejjan (Chitjian/Kalenjjan) - born 1909

Suzanne Tzerounyan - born 1909

Evnige Kabadayan - born between 1897 and 1899

* In essence, it seems I must have been in search of my own identity. My early childhood was derailed by Stalin's purges, followed by the inferno of World War II, with freight trains and labor camps as a way of life for the uprooted masses. Yet even amid this chaos, poetry and music were a must in war-torn Europe. In the occasional improvised piano recitals, my favorite piece was Mozart's "Turkish March" (Sonata No. 11 in A major), which I played enthusiastically, unimpeded by the word "Turkish" in the title. Apropos, the Hippocratic oath, administered to those embarking on a medical career, was taken as unquestionably and naturally binding during my own practice regardless of the patient's background. Ironically, however, among the master planners of twentieth-century genocides, especially under the cover of World War I and II, were men of medicine—doctors who willfully discarded and dishonored the Hippocratic oath.

Fast Forward

This “fast forward” element, that is, the worldwide progeny of genocide survivors, has emerged to reclaim its usurped legacy, striving to redress the unbearable consequences of 1915. As not so uncommon an example, Khngeni’s American-born grandchildren are instinctive participants in the transnational Armenian renaissance. The sequenced photographs in this essay represent the transgenerational evolution generated by the geopolitically imposed migrations of an extended family and of the human strivings to find a place in the sun.

This abridged pictorial narrative is followed by four condensed oral histories of survivors from Ordu. Three of them are of then very young girls who were spared from the death marches but suffered the pains of separation and alienation in and around their native town. The fourth is of a teenage girl, who was among the deportees driven over the mountains all the way to Agn and Kharpert and who eventually ended up in the Crimea and Abkhazia and then Soviet Armenia before enjoying her final years in California.

Khngeni and Hovannes

Khngeni Kalenjian was born in Ordu in the spring of 1909, being one of six children granted to a progressive young couple, Garabed Kalenjian and Hranush Chitjian. But nature, in concert with malevolent humans, erased four of the six. And the two who survived did so at the price of an irreversibly violated childhood. Khngeni, age 6, and brother Hovannes, age 4, would forevermore bear that burden wherever they went, together in Abkhazia, Ukraine, and Germany, and finally one in California and the other in Soviet Armenia.

The Kalenjians and Chitjians, a prominent extended family, lived in the Chitjian neighborhood (*Chitjents tagh*) on the upper slopes of Ordu’s Armenian quarter called Zeitun. While the clan was close-knit, the constituent families lived in separate homes. Grandparents commanded unspoken traditional authority and, living with the eldest son, were regarded as the head of household. So it was with Garabed, who doted over his young family. The bubbly vigor of Khngeni earned her horseback rides to the marketplace with her father. He had his hands full at home dealing with the pranks of his precious, mischievous ball of fire—little Hovannes “*agha*.” In childhood innocence, the youngsters played outdoors and visited friends and relatives freely under the

protective eye of the community. She vividly remembers the cobblestone street in front of her home, very near the Armenian church.

Garabed worked as a blacksmith and saddle-maker and managed the jointly-owned Kalenjian filbert groves. In the marketplace, there seemed to be a congenial relationship between the Muslims and the Armenians, despite their religious differences. All this was before 1915, when a radicalized lethal ideology interrupted that relationship and implemented a master plan of annihilation of an entire people and its material and spiritual culture. With deep trembling emotion, Khngeni still relives the moment when her world was shattered. The following excerpts are from her oral history interview in Fresno, California, in May of 1977.

I remember, as if in a vague dream, being awakened at night. There is a strange commotion. My brother Hovannes and I are hurriedly entrusted to our widowed aunt, who also takes her own four children and our grandmother to the Greek quarter for safety. Father, mother, and the twin infants remain behind. There are kerosene barrels placed everywhere around the Armenian quarter, ready to be set ablaze if all the men fail to come outdoors as ordered. To avoid the worst, my mother Hranush urges Garabed to comply . . . she will manage with the twins. When Garabed emerges from the house, the gendarmes march him off with the other men to the central prison.

Some time after the men are taken away, my gentle mother gives me a handwritten note and money wrapped in a lace handkerchief, instructing me how to take it to the prison, saying that surely I remember the horseback rides through the lower part of the town. I slip through the crowds and guards, get to the barred windows. . . . I see him—Father, pale, moist eyes. Like him, I stand silent and speechless. He reads and then quickly writes a few lines and hands the paper back to me. That is the last time I see him.

When I make my way home from the prison, everything is in turmoil. Strange people are hurrying inside, while others are leaving with the family's bedding, utensils, clothing, everything. . . . Another intruder grabs my six-month old brother, but Mother wrests the infant back. But there is no reprieve. Deprived of the menfolk, our helpless families are ordered to gather only their essentials and to be ready to move out. No one knows why, where, how. My mother Hranush tries

to save her children by leaving one of the twins, along with the family's milking cow, with a Turkish business acquaintance, and the other twin, along with the family's valuables, with a Greek family living near the Armenian church. I, together with a cousin, am sent to yet another Greek home. Suddenly my mother appears in our hiding place to give a parting embrace and a small bundle. She says: "Only Hovannes is coming with me; there are two of you here, take care of each other." Breathlessly, she utters, "Remember me," and quickly disappears. The Greek woman shuts the window. There is a ruckus. We do not understand Greek. The woman presses our lips shut. I still feel the pain of that separation. I am renamed Frosia and start to learn Greek.

Then the *aksor* (exile) begins, with three consecutive caravans leaving the town accompanied by gendarmes. Some exemptions are made, as the very frail and the small children are allowed to stay. Initially, many of these youngsters like me find a place in Greek and Turkish homes, while the less fortunate ones are fed to the waves of the Black Sea. Thereafter another decree orders the Greeks to evict all Armenians in their care or else suffer the consequences. The Greek woman has to put my cousin and me out. I am taken in by a Turkish family and given a new name, Hurriye. My poor cousin dies of typhus. In the summer, my new family moves to a nearby village where various kinds of preserves are made for the coming winter months. Then, one day, I suddenly see two cousins; with tight embraces and uncontrollable sobs, I cry out, "*Mairig . . . Hairig*" (Mother . . . Father), but all is in vain. I am mocked by the village children who gather round and taunt me. So, I have no choice but to submit to my fate and, although only six or seven years old, I become the caretaker for my new mama's and papa's baby, who is strapped to my back all day. I am given many household chores and have no time for play. With the toddler on my back, I sit on a large boulder with my back to the slope, looking and watching. Where is my little brother, Hovannes?

Later, I learn what happened to my family. My mother Hranush and the extended family depart with the first caravan. My father's mother insists that Hovannes, "the light of her eye," remain with them. Just outside of town, a large group of men, stripped to their undergarments, march by the caravan. Broken, half-crazed men and more stoic ones are tied together in twos and threes. My father is among them. In desperation, he implores Hranush to give the gendarmes her valuables and to let a willing Muslim take Hovannes from the caravan. All along the road, local villagers and Muslim refugees, the *muhajirs*, are watching

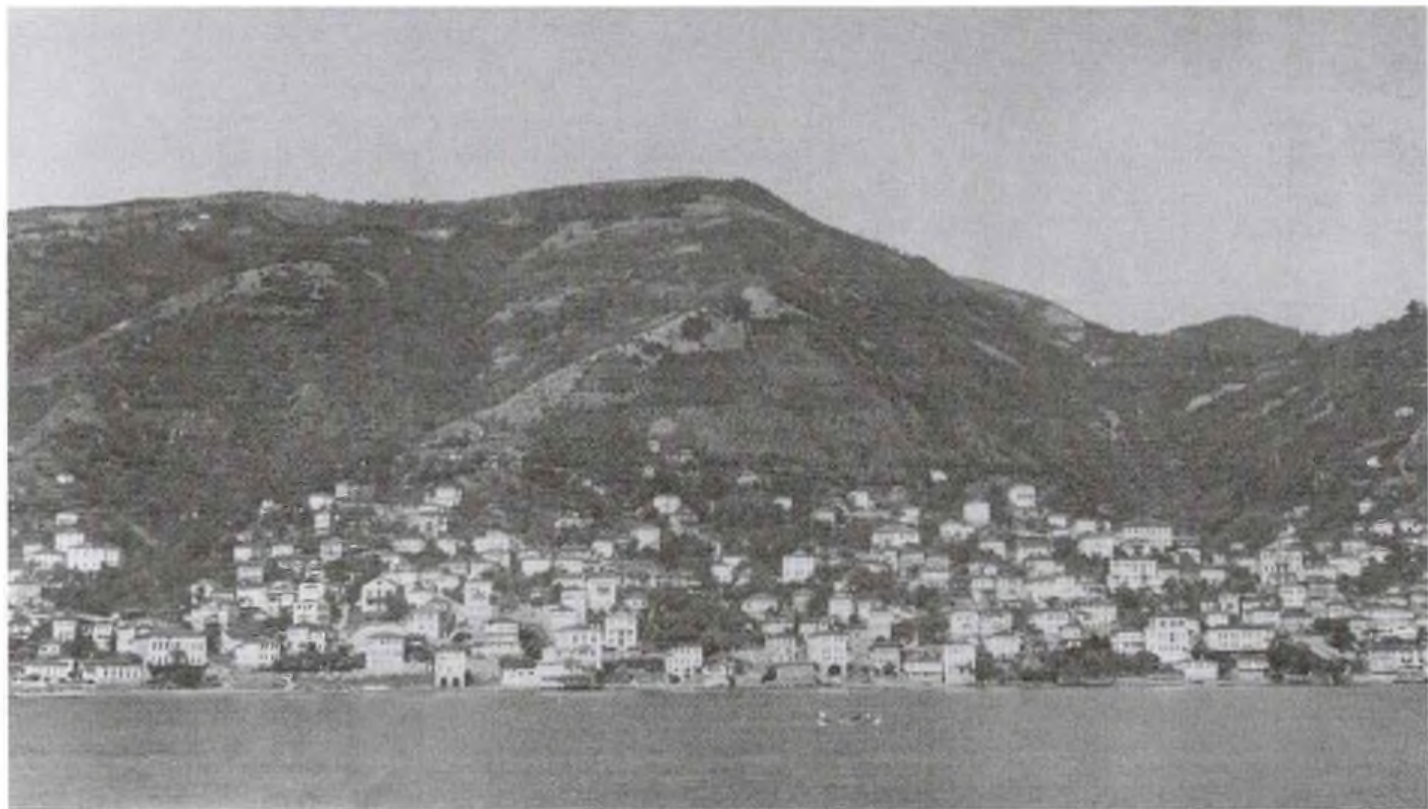
gleefully and in anticipation. Soon the sounds of gunfire and cries come from the nearby woods. Garabed and the rest of the men are killed under the heavy blows of axes, daggers, and bullets. When Hranush tries to give Hovannes to a Muslim woman, as the caravan is being pressed forward toward Melet, the terrified child runs away and back to town where he sees other Armenian youngsters being rounded up, so he climbs the hill to the doorstep of his deserted house. An aunt who is preparing to leave with the last caravan hears the boy's heartbroken sobs and does what she can to console him. She takes him to the marketplace and persuades a sympathetic Turk to take care of the child. The man's teenage son befriends Hovannes, who quickly accepts his new identity as Yusuf. One day, he climbs a tree to pick fresh leaves for the goat he is tending—he falls, bloodied, an unattended leg injury. Unfortunately his guardian dies of the typhus, and many unknown other things happen before Yusuf ends up in the home of an old woman, where he is given various chores.

The seasons come and go. Some of the women, enduring abduction, rape, and extreme deprivation, begin to trickle back to Ordu, there to search for their abandoned children and sometimes to be rewarded with painful yet joyous reunions. I am ecstatic when my mother finds me. We take shelter in a Greek home until we are forced out again by another governmental decree. A Swiss couple who has come to Ordu on business wants to adopt a girl. Somehow, they choose me, shower me with gifts, and offer a lifetime of love and comfort. My mother consents for my sake and leaves the hotel after a final embrace. But I weep incessantly, crying "*Mairig, Mairig.*" Finally, angered and frustrated, they throw me out of their room. I go to the Greek house where we had found shelter earlier, but the woman will not take me in. I sit and cry until one of the daughters hides me and then her father arranges for me to go to a village where my aunt Armenouhi is a servant in a Turkish household. There, I become a part of the family and am put in charge of a Turkish orphan girl. Later, the family moves to Ordu and settles in one of the many vacant homes.

When the war ends in 1918, the survivors emerge from their hiding places; search for their loved ones; look for any kind of work to subsist. My adoptive mother releases me to my mother, but Hovannes—Yusuf, my brother, has forgotten his Armenian origins and runs away from his relatives. The Turkish woman finally hands him over once she is paid off. Yusuf, deeply browned by the sun and in rags, resumes his shattered Armenian childhood. But troubled times follow us—hunger,

destitution, political unrest. With little choice, my aunts Imasdouhi and Haigouhi (who had to abandon her two small children born from a Turkish captor) arrange for Hovannes and me to be placed in the newly-organized Armenian orphanage in the former schoolhouse. But this was only a brief respite from the whirlpool of events that would cast us on the eastern shores of the Black Sea, first Batum, then Sukhum. The unforeseen turn of events was to take me to Kharkov in the Ukraine and then during World War II to Belorussia, Poland, and Germany (a Stuttgart Displaced Persons camp after the war), and ultimately to the sweltering heat of the vineyards of the San Joaquin Valley of California, and finally to a bustling houseful of a new generation of eight grandchildren (Raffi, Armen, Ani, Garo, and Hrair, Arpi, Vahe, Aram) in our modest, welcoming abode in Fresno's old Armenian Hazelwood district.

The pictorial section that follows spans the twentieth century and combines images of a personal journey of rediscovery at the end of the century with the faces and places existing at the time of the great calamity of 1915.



Ordu as It Was



Ordu as It Is



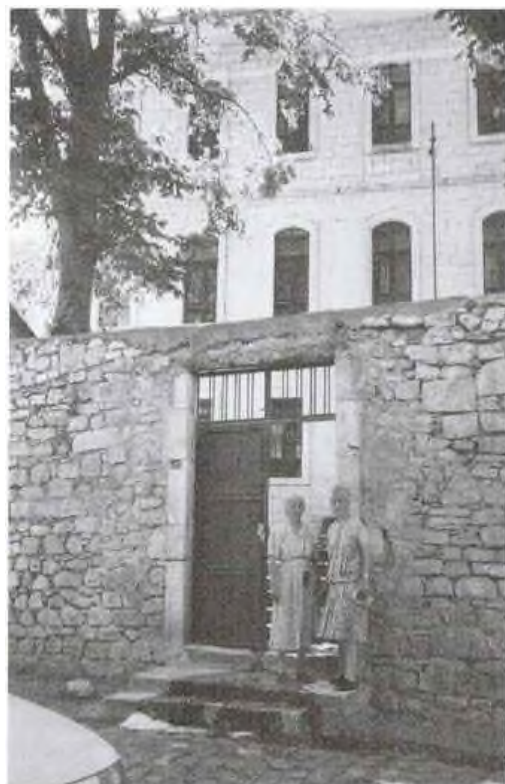
The Familiar Corn and Bean Stalks



On the Threshold



Surb Astvatsatsin Church
Converted to a Mosque



The Armenian School and
Then Orphanage



Discovery of
Khngeni's Home



Doorway, Old Armenian
Quarter



Grandmother Srpouhi Kalenjian



Hranush and Garabed Kalenjian



Hranush, Cousin, and Sister in Traditional Dress



Baby Khngeni, 1909



Teachers, National Coeducational School, Principal Tigran Devoyants, Seated Center



Graduating Class, 1913, Principal Tigran Devoyants, Seated, Aram Manukian, Center, Siranoush Hekimian and Evnige Kabadayan to His Right



Boz Tepe, School Picnic, Aram Manukian Standing Center



Sukhum: Relocated Pontic Armenian Schoolchildren, 1922-23



Kharkov: Rescued Sisters, Imasdouhi, Hranush, Armenouhi, 1926



Kharkov: Khngeni and Hovannes,
1926



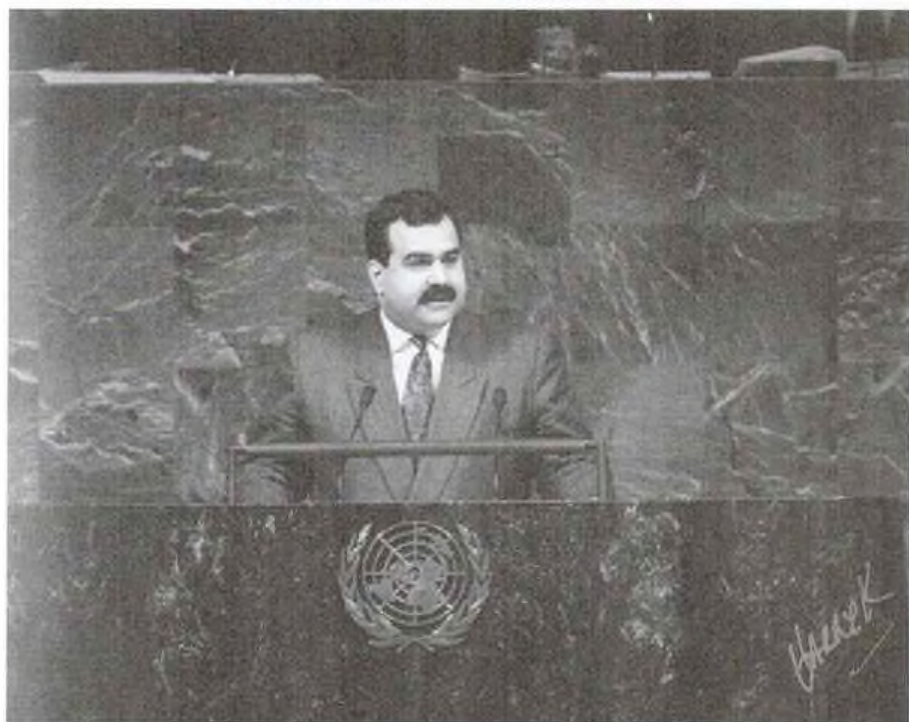
Kharkov: Hovakim Kotcholosian and
Khngeni, 1927



Kharkov: Khngeni and Hovannes, with New Generation of Cousins and Vartiter on Lap



Fresno: Hazelwood District, 1972



New York: United Nations, March 2, 1992, Grandson Raffi K. Hovannisian as Armenia's Foreign Minister

Shnorhig Kalenjian (Teknejian)

Shnorhig, born 1909 in Ordu, remembers her violated childhood in 1915— orphaned, expelled from her hometown, struggling for survival, and then trekking halfway around the world via Constantinople, Greece, Romania, Soviet Armenia, and finally Los Angeles, where her interview was recorded in May of 1996. She is collected, with subdued dignified demeanor, alert and articulate, as she describes her dreamlike family world—an older and two younger brothers, parents, grandparents—in a traditional three-storey stone house on the hilltop overlooking the Black Sea, with the laundry area downstairs, kitchen and living-room above, and sleeping area on the upper level. Her maternal grandfather's six brothers and their families resided nearby in similar homes so that the neighborhood was known as *Chitjents tagh*. Her memory of the church is hazy, but she remembers the school clearly, especially as that three-storey stone building was to become a decisive link in her precarious survival. Her summarized semi-paraphrased interview follows.

Fifteen days before the *aksor*, they started rounding up the men. A neighbor's house is set afire; no one emerges. As my father does not go out, they start pouring kerosene around our house. My father then dashes out and is taken away, never to be seen again. He was a respected church trustee. A gendarme slaps my mother as they leave. That day, they apprehend seventeen others who are killed a short distance from town and dumped into a well. I remember that later we stood frozen over the well that had been filled with rocks. At the time of the deportation, my grandfather's Turkish business acquaintance pleads for the children to be left behind, for certain death awaits everyone who has to leave. So, my brother and I are adopted by him and given the names of Nuriye and Jemal. Father, together with many other relatives, perishes; my grandfather, his six brothers with their wives, do not return. Only some of the children sheltered by Turks and Greeks remain alive and later are able to regain their identity.

Mother gives her one-and-half year old son to a Greek family, and taking her eldest son departs with the deportation caravan. Timeless time goes by. A gendarme on horseback is searching for sheltered Armenian children. Our adoptive Turk mother hates us and turns us in.

We are taken to the government house, which is crowded with Armenian children. I recognize cousins and my sick uncle but never see them again. Cries, tears, confusion. My adoptive father who was near the mosque rescues us, but our stepmother becomes even more abusive, always keeping us hungry and frightened.

My real mother who becomes very ill during the deportation is saved by a Greek woman and manages to Ordu with her son. Much time has gone by. She finds us and takes us to another Greek family where her toddler is. There, we learn about the children who were turned out of the Greek and Turkish homes and taken to the government house. We hear that they were loaded on boats and drowned in the open sea. A twelve-year old cousin, a beautiful girl, was spared and taken home by one of the perpetrators. Horrified, shaken, she becomes ill. A Greek woman takes care of the terrified, jaundiced child, but she suffers an agonizing death.

Once more the government orders all Armenians to be expelled. What are we to do? We return to the adoptive Turkish father, who cannot help; he is a government official. He advises us to go to Fatsa, where the authorities are not as severe. We go back to the Greek family. The poor Greeks, though not massacred like the Armenians, will later be exiled from their ancestral homes. The Greek family finds a horse for us. So, here we are, a mother and son who have escaped a two-year deportation, together with her other rescued children, now all "illegals" in their own native town. When we get to Fatsa, we find the home of Ardem, my mother's childhood friend who is married into the Yorganians family.

We share a small, narrow hiding space with other survivors. My brother goes begging at night with the three Yorganians brothers and rests during the daytime. They behave, dress, and speak Turkish and have Turkish names. With the small scraps of bread they manage to beg and scrounge, we subsist for a while longer. My mother hears that my grandfather may be alive in Melet, so we set out on the road, barefoot, hungry. I don't remember how many days, but, in vain, because we find that grandfather has been killed. We are again rounded up and put on the road of exile toward Hoylasar. On the way we have to pass through the Idirdagh woods—piles of corpses are being assaulted by flocks of noisy vultures. I remember this all vividly. My mother learns that these were men from Tamzara who were recently killed. We are in a dwindling caravan of only about 60 women and children, who, when

lying down for the night, take note of who isn't there any longer. One day, my elder brother is counted among the lost.

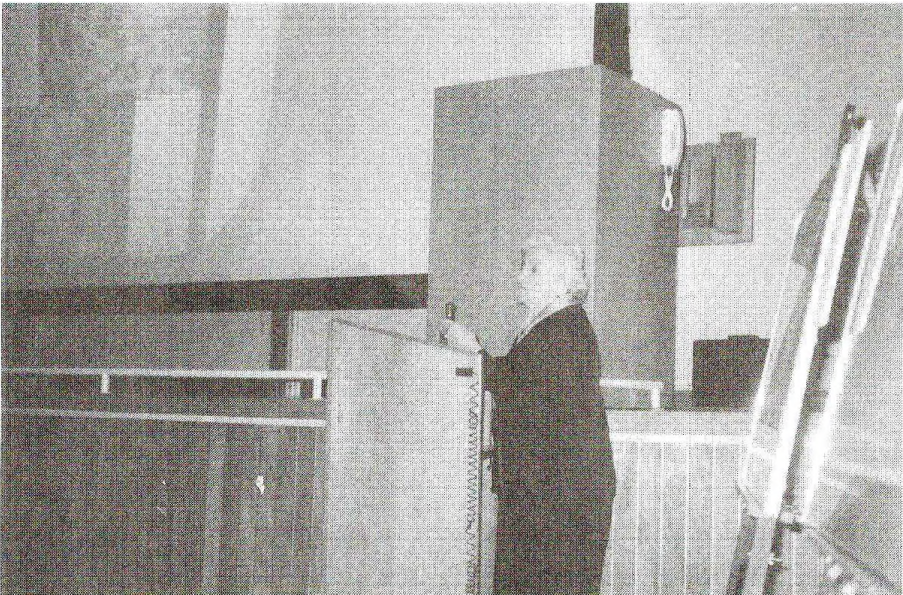
In Tamzara, which is now a ghost town, rumors are heard that the Russians are approaching Lazistan and Trebizond. The gendarmes suddenly disappear. We turn around and begin to walk toward Lazistan. Barefooted, no food, eating only grass and greens that Mother recognizes as being edible, but even so our bellies swell up. We finally reach Surmene on the sea and remain there—Turkified, with Turkish names, several families in one house, and we children can no longer speak Armenian.

One day, a Turkish doctor announces: "Armenians are free to return to their homes." Maybe the war is over. Still disguised as Turks, we find space in a boat. Not having money, Mother offers the Laz boatman some yardage that she has gotten from a Greek shopkeeper. We finally reach Ordu—sadness, desolation, loneliness—seven brothers' semi-ruined, deserted houses. The doors, windows, and woodwork of our home have been carried away and the upper storey is demolished.

Shnorhig goes on to tell about her life after the war. The Ordu orphanage in the Armenian school becomes a beacon amid the ruins, a modicum of security, basic care, and education giving hope. Within a year, however, because of renewed unrest, the orphans are moved to the Ortakiugh orphanage in Constantinople. Then, in 1922, the Kemalist victory and occupation of Constantinople necessitate the swift transfer of the children to Greece. During her three years in an orphanage there, Shnorhig takes vocational education classes, remembering fondly Dr. and Mrs. George White, Armenian-speaking American missionary educators with years of service at Anatolia College in Marsovan. In 1926, Shnorhig's mother, who has ended up in Romania, is finally able to reclaim her now seventeen-year old daughter.

In Bucharest, with an active Armenian community that has a school, church, scouts, and other organizations, Shnorhig meets and marries a young Ordu survivor, Hampartzum Teknejian, in 1927, but he dies six years later. A young widow, Shnorhig works hard to raise her two young sons. In 1946, she repatriates with her family to Soviet Armenia, where great disillusion awaits them, as thousands of repatriates are sent to Siberia while others live in constant fear. In 1986, the now-enlarged family succeeds in immigrating to the United States.

In Erevan, on every April 24, Shnorhig's family, with tens of thousands of others, walked up to the Tsitsernakaberd Genocide Memorial to place flowers around the eternal flame. In California, only once was she able to climb to the Armenian Martyrs' Memorial in Bicknell Park in Montebello. As she declined physically, her mind remained ever alert; she was an avid reader. Each April, she would telephone the Turkish consul general in Los Angeles with an important message. Not once permitted to reach beyond the receptionist, she nonetheless delivered her somber monologue in excellent Turkish. The office personnel promised to relay the recorded heart-to-heart message to the "occupied" or "absent" consul general. If he ever listened, this is what she said: "The unrequited pain in the hearts of the brutally violated victims notwithstanding, I must tell you that your government's immoral and shameful denial of the genocide leaves no room for me and others like me to acknowledge and express gratitude to the rescuers, the good Turks, who, whatever their motives, made our survival possible."



Los Angeles: Shnorhig Teknejian Testifying at UCLA Conference, 2002

Suzanne Tzerunyan

In 1994, 85-year old Suzanne Tzerunyan was interviewed in Pasadena, California. Ironically, it was to be her last *dun* (home) in a long chain in her oft-changing life that extended over four continents. This sequence of *duns* beginning in her birthplace of Ordu reflects the disruption of her life but not of her lucid memory. Her condensed testimony follows.

In 1915, we were five sisters: Haigouhi, 10; Hasmig, 8; Suzanne, 6; Zvart, 4; Sirvart, 1½. I remember Father would line us up for exercise. Sirvart, who had just started walking, would be bundled up and tied to Haigouhi's back. So, I was six years old when the massacres began.

They came at night and took my father. Father was sleeping with his brother. The gendarmes shouted: "If you don't come out now, we will hang your entire family on your threshold." Mother was terribly frightened. "Janig," she cried, "get up, get up and go, get dressed, the children—*meghk en* [they are helpless; to be pitied], and so forth. My father got up and went outside, but not his brother. They took my father. So, he was among the first to be taken and, of course, we did not hear from him again. My father was the first in our family to be killed. We were scattered to different *duns*—Greek, Turkish—because I have to say that the Turks of our Ordu were very decent. They would say to the Armenians: "This can't be, this can't be; you cannot take the children with you; it is a shame; leave them, and when you return, we will return them to you." I was placed in a Greek *dun*, Sirvart and Hasmig in another Greek *dun*, and Haigouhi in one Turkish *dun*, and Zvart in another.

Soon after, however, the Greeks were ordered to turn out all the sheltered Armenian children. The Greek priest with whom I was staying had to announce this in the church service, yet he did not want me to leave. But he was chastised by those who asked why he was telling them to give up their Armenian children while he was still keeping me. I knew I had to go, and so I left and became a waif. I remember waking up one night with a very dark stranger looking down at me. He lifted me . . . I was screaming and thrashing, but the stranger took me to the home of his relatives and then to another house where he had a Greek servant look after me. She took care of me, combed my hair, and so

forth. The strange man showered me with toys, sweets, and fancy gifts like lace stockings. Apparently, I was intended as the bride-to-be for his son.

I recall being taken to the seashore . . . on a boat headed to Surmene, the stranger's home. The voyage was interrupted by Russian bombardment of the coast, so we had to stop in Trebizond in a hotel. An Armenian teenager from Ordu was there, and she begged to go with us to be saved. I was extremely seasick all the way to Surmene, where I learned that the stranger was a *bey* in a nearby village. He had three children, including a teenage son, my intended future husband. The girl who had joined us in Trebizond was to take care of me, but we could speak no Armenian. The man even threatened to kill us and dump us into the sea if he heard us speaking Armenian. Soon, he no longer allowed her to be with me and instead made her a household servant. I was sent to a Turkish school. My sense of time was marked by changes of the seasons. Heavy snow fell in the winter. I remember that on the way to school through deep snowdrifts, I slipped and was hurt. Children from a nearby house, whom I later found out to be Armenian, had been watching me and rushed out to help. The season changed again. It was spring. The snow was melting. At the same time, the Russian bombardments intensified, and the Turkish army began to retreat. So, after about six months, we went back to Ordu.

Meanwhile my sister Zvart was in the *dun* of a kind Turk. Because she cried day and night, he wanted to find members of her family and, by asking here and there, found out where the other sisters were. So, when he heard that we had returned to Ordu, he came and asked me, "Do you know Suzanne?" I answered, "I don't know any Suzanne," but then he told me that he had come to take me to my sister. I trembled with such excitement that I spilled the glass of water in my hand. The next day came the emotional reunion with my sister. By then, my mother had escaped from the deportation caravan and, with the help of a Turkish lady, a *khanum*, and dressed in Muslim garb, she had managed to get back to Ordu and find my eldest sister, Haigouhi. Thus, we became reunited. I was in terrible shape, in tattered clothes and covered with lice. My sisters removed my infested clothes and took me to a special place where Turkish women were able to cleanse me and turn me into a pretty doll. I was saved in this way. Then our family was placed in the large home of Ali Bey in a nearby village. He was such a kind man. I recall being taught by him to read the Quran. That large family had helped and harbored many Armenians. Some Armenian

young men who had escaped the massacres had gone up into the hills with their arms. I remember their passing by Ali Bey's home, where from my hiding place behind a tree I saw them riding armed on horseback. They were given food and drink at Ali Bey's home.

It must have been the end of the war, because one day the leader of the armed band, whose name was Garabed, came and placed me on his knee, asking: "Do you want to go to school?" By that time, I was speaking only Turkish. Yes, I wanted to go to an Armenian school. Ali Bey was so concerned about us that he loaded us down with food and supplies as my family set out for Ordu. Were we to find our *dun*? No, it had been ransacked and we were destitute. There were so many of us, five girls, that we were placed in the orphanage. My mother became a cook there, and my eldest sister taught the alphabet to kindergarteners in the Armenian church, while the upper classes met in the school building.

This may have lasted a year. Then, news that the terrifying Topal Osman was coming forced the orphanage to prepare to flee overnight. We had heard that in Marsovan he had slaughtered all the orphans and children who had been rescued and had even burned some of them in ovens. We were soon on a ship to Bolis [Constantinople], where we were received well in the Ortakiugh and Beshiktash orphanages. Excellent care, cleanliness, orderliness, instruction, crafts. But the victory of Mustafa Kemal's forces triggered a new exodus, perhaps it was the autumn of 1922, to Corfu. I remember that there, on New Year's Eve, it snowed for the first time in forty years.

Suzanne goes on to tell of orphanage life; relocation to Egypt and going to an American school there; the solicitousness of an American missionary couple, the Atchesons; later repatriation to Soviet Armenia, where, like so many others, her family experienced bitter disappointments until managing to immigrate to the United States. With no calendar record or ability to rely on her seasonal perception any longer, Suzanne gave the following approximate chronology of *duns* since the disruption of 1915:

1915-16: Ordu, Greek home; homeless; Trebizond; Surmene
1916-18: Ordu, Turkish home and Ali Bey's village

- 1918-19: Ali Bey's village; Ordu, ruined family home and
 Armenian orphanage
 1919-22: Constantinople orphanages
 1923-25: Corfu, Greece, orphanage
 1925-27: Syros, Greece, orphanage
 1927-48: Egypt, school and work
 1948-90: Soviet Armenia
 1990 onward: California and "Diaspora sans Frontières"

Evnige Kabadayan

Evnige, a teenage graduate of Ordu's only coeducational school in 1913, was taking sewing lessons when deportation orders reached her hometown. In 1980, at the age of over 80, she was interviewed in a small Hollywood apartment with a family of five, her final residence on her tortuous and torturous trek of life. She reminisced longingly about her beloved Ordu. Some of the questions of the interviewer are omitted from the excerpts of that interview which follow (the questions are in italics and brackets).

Our city was on the coast. It was a beautiful city. When we looked out of our window, we could see the sunrise. It was beautiful. There were three separate quarters—Armenian, Turkish, and Greek. Of course, the government buildings were located in the Turkish quarter. The marketplace was also a large place on the border between the Greek and Turkish quarters. The Armenian quarter was on a high hill. The Greek quarter was in a vale, and the Turkish one was on another, much lower easterly hill. The Armenian quarter was way up and had two parts. They were close to each other but were separated by a ravine. One side was called Zeitun, but the other side didn't have a name, I don't know why.

The Armenian quarter was the nicest with good roads and streets. I have never been in the Turkish quarter, but the Greek one was just spread out along the seashore. . . . We had a school and a church. We had a kindergarten and an eight-year normal school. I graduated from

that school and they took our photograph. Aram Pasha [Manukian] was in that picture, too—Dashnaktsakan Aram Pasha. . . . He was a highly respected head teacher.

[Did Aram Pasha do anything else in your village besides being a teacher-administrator?]

He could have had a connection wherever the Dashnaktsakan party was active. . . . Both the Dashnaktsakan party and the Hinchakian party existed in our city. . . . I do not know what they did, but I know that, for example, my mother's brother was a member of the Dashnaktsakan party. But we didn't make any inquiries about the work they did, so I don't know.

[O.K. What did your father do?]

My father owned a small grocery store. It was his occupation. We could barely make a living. We had a very humble house. It was a small house of two rooms. Later my father built a kitchen, too. My grandmother had bought that house. She had worked weaving cloth for many years and had saved enough money to buy the house when my father was fifteen years old.

[Generally, what did the Armenians do?]

What did they do? All the trades belonged to the Armenians: copper work, pharmacy, and so on. In short, the Armenians applied their abilities well everywhere. All of the handymen, barbers, and bakers were Armenian. There were some Greeks, too, but very few. They occupied themselves with commerce more often.

[Did you have any relations with the Turks?]

We, the women, did not socialize with them. But the men did because, for example, my father traded with them. He bought goods from villagers. If we met a Turk on the street, we just went our own ways. No one said a word to us. If we passed by the marketplace, there were some Turkish houses. Nobody said anything to us. There have been cases when I had to walk through an entire street in order to go home, and no one said anything. There were two baths, one in the Turkish quarter and the other in the Greek quarter on the shore. We tried to go to the bath in the Greek quarter. Of course, there were separate days for the Armenians and the Turks. Well, I don't know about men. I don't remember that. I don't remember when they went there.

[All right. How did you get the news about World War I? Were you informed in your home that the war had started?]

How could I not be informed? As the saying goes, "News passes very quickly by word of mouth," especially when we had an Armenian

who had some connections with important Russian people. I think he was following their ships or something like that. They used to say he was a Russian ambassador. He wasn't an ambassador, but they used to say that. I remember it that way. We could find out everything. The steamers came and left constantly. So, there was information. . . . The Turks conscripted Armenians for the war, too. For example my older *keri* [mother's brother] was drafted and was sent to the Bulgarian front. . . . He wrote that a bullet hit his gun, and his gun broke: "If it had hit a bit left or right, I would have been killed." When the war ended, he left for America, and didn't return to Ordu.

[Did the Turks announce that everyone had to give up their weapons? Do you remember anything like that in your city?]

There was no one in our city who owned weapons. I know that no one in our neighborhood had a weapon. . . . Now I can say that in 1915 the Russian ships came close to the shore and fired at the Turkish quarters, at the buildings, at the houses, yes, and the Turks from those parts came to our side, to our quarter, for safety. I remember that. That happened, because I remember they passed by in large groups.

[Did deportations take place in your city? I mean, did they deport the Armenians from Ordu?]

Oh, yes, they did. It was in June of 1915 if I am not mistaken. It was in June, but our Armenians appealed to the government asking for intervention so that they wouldn't have to go. The Turkish government said: "Become Turks. Convert to Islam, and you won't leave. You won't be deported." And some people converted. Certainly not everyone. Several families went there and converted: "God is one. There is no other God, and Mohammed is His Prophet." They were relieved that they would no longer be exiled. But the central government decided that nevertheless they were the same Christians even though they had converted to Islam, and so they should be deported, too.

Then they started deporting us in groups. Before that, they had imprisoned some of the men. They sent away those tied up prisoners in advance. For example, my mother's brother and my grandfather were imprisoned. An Armenian soldier who had deserted and was in hiding passed by their house while the men were outside. Just for that, they were all arrested and taken to prison. . . .

My uncle was in a very bad mental condition in prison. My father went and signed for him and brought him home. I remember that very well. I made coffee when my uncle came. I said: "Uncle, this one is for you and this one is for father." There were two separate cups because

my father liked his coffee with little sugar. Then my uncle attacked me: "So you are trying to get me to drink poison?" He was already mentally disturbed. Then I went away crying, and my mother said, "Hush, Hush . . . calm down." Then my uncle slowly recovered, and they took him back to prison because my father had got him released temporarily. My father was a very resourceful man; he could find a common tongue with anyone. When they took my uncle back, we decided to leave the city but it was too late, because they were already deporting my uncle and my grandfather, so we followed them. For some time, they were with us. They were in our group. We were together.

We didn't sell the house, but I remember that we took the stuff out. They probably sold those. For instance, my uncle and my grandfather took out the things they had; they probably sold those. We had nothing to do with these things. The adults took care of that.

[You left with your entire family?]

No, not with the entire family. They issued an edict that children under ten were allowed to stay in the city. The next-door neighbor to my father's store was Greek. My father asked him to take care of my younger brother. He agreed. We took my brother's clothing, bed, and so forth to the man's house. My brother came to see us off when we were leaving. He bade farewell to us crying. . . .

My father bought two horses. They loaded the bedding, the clothing, and whatever we needed, for instance, two-three small pots so that we could cook something to eat on the way. We took only the very necessary items. But we loaded a lot of bedding on the horses. We went by foot and put those on the horses. On the way, we were with my mother's sister and my grandmother. Our family was in that group. My other grandmother was a very old woman—my father's mother. She stayed behind. They supposedly gathered up people like that. . . . Later we learned that they were thrown into the sea. . . . Yes, my grandmother, too. Marine's sister had just delivered a baby, and she had been left there, too. She survived. They took away the baby, but she managed to survive. She later told us that they had thrown everyone into the sea.

[What reasons did they give you when they deported you? Did they say why you had to leave?]

Why? It was just an order, and we had to obey it. Why would they care to give us explanations about their actions? They assigned several gendarmes to our group. We walked during the day and rested at night. We lay down and continued our way again the next morning. . . . So

we went on like that. One night, a woman gave birth to a child next to a Greek house. Whether it was a girl or a boy, I cannot recall. They gave the baby to the Greeks, and the next day, the baby's mother had to continue on the road. We reached the town of Melet. There I got sick, and they called a doctor. The doctor was a Turk, of course. He gave me some medicine, and then he said: "It is a pity to take this girl with you and ruin her. Give her to me." My uncle lied: "That is my wife. How can I leave her?" The doctor didn't say anything else, and we went on. Oh, I shouldn't forget to say that when we became [converted] Turks, we started covering ourselves like the Turks. You could see only our eyes so that you couldn't tell whether we were girls or women, ugly or beautiful. After Melet, there was a building. I don't know what kind of building it was, but it was abandoned. It might have been a rich Armenian's house. I am not sure. As it was vacant, we occupied it. Several Armenians came. They wanted to give away their daughter to a Turk so that they could stay there. I don't know if they were able to do that or not.

We continued on toward Agn. We hadn't reached Arabkir yet. It was Agn. We were very poorly fed there for a long time. They were selling cheap cows there. My father bought one and killed it. He said: "Our shoes are worn out. We can make shoes from its skin to wear." But it certainly didn't work out. Whether it was because of that beef or something else, people got sick with diarrhea. We went on like that and got to Arabkir. We met a few women who were staying there. They later joined us. We found out that they were from Tripoli [Tireboli], which is also on the shore of the Black Sea. . . . We walked and walked. My father was very ill. I told you already what happened after we ate the beef. But I, on the contrary, became more energetic.

[Were you constantly accompanied by gendarmes?]

Yes. Oh, I forgot to say that when evening came the gendarmes demanded money, gold. The people gathered money among themselves and gave it to them. One morning we were in that building that I mentioned when the gendarmes demanded the horse of a rich Armenian who was with us. He refused to give it. They cursed: "You will never walk again." They took him away, and we heard how they shot him. The gunshots were heard. Then they took his horse.

Later on, we were resting again. We hadn't spread out the bedding. We were lying directly on the tied-up bedding, and my brother was lying on my father's coat. The gendarme shouted at him: "Get up! I want to rest, too. You have been on it long enough." My brother refused. He

was a kid. The gendarme told him, "You will not be alive tomorrow." My mother heard that. My father wasn't there at that time, and when he came back, she told him about that. My father asked which one it was, and my mother explained. He then went to the gendarme, who turned out to be an acquaintance. My father said: "Oh, you are an acquaintance of mine. Let me give you a gift." And he gave his coat to him so that he wouldn't kill my brother the next day.

Then there was a woman from our city. One day, she saw a necklace on one of the gendarme's neck and started to cry. My mother asked, "Why are you crying?" She answered: "That is my husband's necklace. They have taken it from him, and this means that they have killed him." Things of that sort happened very often.

At first, the Armenians were able to collect money and give it to the gendarmes, but later on, they no longer had any money. So, at nights the gendarmes searched them and took away whatever they could find. They got everyone naked from head to foot. They searched thoroughly. They even stuck their fingers into the women's you-know-what because they had noticed that women were hiding money and gold there. And they seized it all. After that, they hit them shouting, "Why were you hiding it?"

One night, they were searching like that again, and I was afraid. I didn't want to come forth. I saw that they had already stuck their fingers into a girl, and she could no longer take it. She was crying and turning from one side to another. I got extremely scared. There was almost no one else left to be searched. My father said, "She is my daughter," and my grandfather said, "she's my daughter-in-law." They hit everyone, and my grandmother pulled me by my arm and took me to the other side because the gendarmes were on this side, and the ones who had already been checked were on the other side. Thus, I was saved. But I suffered so much, so much. . . .

Oh, I have forgotten to tell about something else, too. Once, in broad daylight . . . they usually searched at night, but this time they were doing it during the day. There was something like a cave on a small hill. They told us to go there. . . . They drove us all into the cave, and they started searching and letting us out one by one. My father's two cousins, two sisters, one of them pretended that the other one was sick so that she could go first. The thing is that the other one was hiding money inside herself, and they wanted to save the money. The gendarmes searched her, found the gold and took it out of there. They started to beat her with a whip. Then they continued searching and

searching. . . . Fortunately, some other people were passing by, and the gendarmes were afraid that they would see what was happening, so they let everyone out and told us not to say anything. We were saved that way from it all.

Another time, the gendarmes saw a girl and wanted to take her. They told her father: "Give this girl to us." He answered: "How can I give you my daughter? Wherever I go, my daughter comes with me." That same night, when we settled somewhere, in a house, the *chetes* [brigands] came and searched everywhere. I was lying there and was not feeling well. They looked at the faces of every girl to see if there were any young and beautiful ones, and I was lying there. They told my mother to lift the cover so that they could see my face. I am not sure if it was by chance or I was pretending, but I was shaking. Was it for real or not, I don't know. They said: "Go back to bed, go back! We don't need her." My mother gave some gifts to them. . . . We learned the next morning that they had taken away several girls. My father's cousin came and saw that I was there and that they hadn't taken me away. They had taken her daughter. She started walking around in an angry manner because they had not taken me, but they had taken her daughter. They had taken away several girls. I remember that. The next day, we started walking. That girl's father, the one whom the gendarmes wanted to take, he was sitting right in front of my eyes and rolling a cigarette when a gendarme came up from behind and shot him. He fell.

[*Without saying anything?*]

Yes, without a word. I don't know if they buried him or not. They wouldn't allow it. They took his clothes off and kept them. So, we went on our way like that. We walked and walked and got to a Kurdish village. My mother said: "The Kurds are looking for a girl. If someone likes you, just go with him." That really hurt me. She explained: "Your father says that they will eventually take you away along the way. So, what difference does it make whether it's here or there?" I cried, "I won't go."

[*Why did your mother say that?*]

To save me. If I could have saved them all, I would have agreed. But why would I want to be away from them just to save myself? Lusanoush's two sisters stayed there. Their father was a barber. They needed him, so he stayed, too. But they didn't survive. Only one of Lusanoush's sisters and her brother survived. I don't know what happened to them.

[Did they marry Kurds and stay there?]

Yes, they stayed. Their parents stayed, too. We continued our way. We were passing by the river Murad, the Euphrates, and I was extremely thirsty. There wasn't any water anywhere. I wanted to go and drink some water, but my mother wouldn't let me. I found an opportunity and ran to the river. It was full of corpses. I tried not to look anywhere. I just went there, drank the water, and came back. My mother got very angry. But I was very thirsty. . . . There were bodies on the ground, too. The sick ones fell down and stayed like that. There was a woman's body. It looked like a horse. It had swollen badly under the sun. I can still see it in front of my eyes. There were bodies everywhere. After that, it all started. Bodies, bodies, bodies . . . both on the ground and in the river. Once, there was a dead woman next to the road, and her baby was moving weakly in her lap with its eyes open. I felt so bad, so bad. I didn't have any strength left in me, but if that child had been a bit healthier, I would have carried it with me. That's what has been imprinted in my memory. It's a very bad thing.

The Turks took away everything we had. The Turkish villagers attacked us and took everything away. They probably had bribed the gendarmes. They gathered and took away everything, and we were left with nothing. We reached the bridge of that River Murad. Before we crossed the bridge, my father died. He had been very gravely ill. I told my mother: "I don't care what they will do to me. Even if they kill me, I will bury my father." My mother answered: "You think I don't want that? I want to bury him, too. I will bury your father. We will stay here with your uncle, and we will bury him together. Your grandfather is weak. You should help him cross the bridge. You should go ahead and slowly cross it, and we will catch up with you." They persuaded me that way, and I went with my grandfather. We went forward for quite a while, and then they caught up with us. . . . They put my grandmother on a donkey, and we went ahead. My grandmother died on the way. We put her in a hole, and the Turks were waiting above it so that when we move away, they could take off her clothes. My uncle was sitting there with tears in his eyes. Anyway, my mother could no longer walk, and when the donkey became available, she got on it. She had already become sick, and she could hardly walk. She had no strength left in her. Even when she was sitting on the donkey, she had to lean on me with one arm. I was walking by the donkey. She said: "Ah, it's so good that you are with me." She remembered that I refused to leave. We went to an Armenian village, which was in ruins.

[Do you remember the name of that village?]

No, I don't. It was a short way from Kharpert. Not actually Kharpert, but Mezre. Kharpert was an old city. Mezre was a new one. The Turks, those scoundrels, had built it. I lay down next to my mother. We used to spread something thin on the ground. It was rough. Then, I felt that my mother was cold. I started crying. My aunt took me away, and in the morning, we buried my mother. The next day, we stayed there the whole day. We had walked a long distance. Then, my grandfather died, and we buried him. Everyone helped us. We couldn't have done that by ourselves.

A Turk saw me there and started asking around about me. When my mother died, my aunt became my mother. He came to my aunt and asked her to give me to him. My aunt came to me and told me about it, and I said that if he agreed to take my family with him, too, I would sacrifice myself and would marry that Turk. If not, I wouldn't. My aunt goes to him and tells him that if he agreed to take my mother (actually my aunt), father (my uncle) and brother with him, then he could marry me. The Turk went to the authorities and was told that he could take my aunt, my brother, and me, but not my uncle. When I learned that, I said no. My aunt tried to persuade me: "You are a woman. My brother is gravely ill; he will most likely die soon anyway." I said I wouldn't marry the Turk. So, I hid away from my aunt, and started walking separately from her. We were passing by Mezre, at a distance, of course. . . .

We had left Mezre far behind when some Turkish women with three kids asked: "Are there any young people among you?" I replied, "What for?" I approached them. I wasn't afraid because they were women. That woman got a strong hold of my arm and said, "Come with me!" Both my uncle and my aunt caught up with us. The Turkish woman said: "Let her become our servant." I asked my uncle: "What should I do. Do you think I should stay with them or come with you?" He said: "I cannot tell you anything. In this short amount of time, you have amassed so much life experience that you should be the one to decide." The gendarmes were approaching us, and I was quickly covered so that they wouldn't see me. The caravan moved on toward Mosul, and I stayed. . . . I was in such bad condition but they made me carry their child, who was a boy of about 6-7 or maybe 5 years old. They made me carry him even though I was in bad shape. I went with them. We went to a Turk's house and they brought some food. We ate and then returned to their home. Again, they made me carry the child.

Then somehow my aunt joined us. Oh yes, there was an Armenian woman sitting there. She was about thirty years old. They have brought her, too. . . . We were foolish, but that woman was smart. She had been brought there as a servant but was pretending to be sick and just sitting there. She secretly told us that there were Protestant missionaries in Kharpert. Mezre was in a valley, but Kharpert was an old city on the highlands.

A local Armenian woman explained that this house had belonged to a doctor, an Armenian doctor. They had killed him and had thrown his pregnant wife out. Then they had moved in. The Turkish pasha's secretary had moved in there. He was from Trebizond. He had two or three daughters and a little son. His oldest daughter was married to a man from Ordu who knew my father. After he learned that, his attitude toward us changed. After my aunt joined us, we were allowed to go to the public bath. We were crying and crying; there were plenty of lice on our heads. We took a bath crying all the time and came out and went home.

So, our days passed like that, and one day my aunt learned that a Turk from Ordu was going back. My aunt asked him to take us with him because she had four children left behind there. She had seen a dream with four shaky pillars under the house, so she thought that meant we were going to be freed. It was on her mind all the time, and one day she asked, "Where are they [the Turkish family]?" I answered, "In the garden." She slipped away to the garden of a Greek neighbor. I was supposed to meet her at night and get away to Kharpert. But at night I went out several times and couldn't find her, and for the next several days I cried myself to sleep.

[Evnige describes in detail her life in the Turkish home, her eventual escape with the assistance of two Assyrian women, and her reunion with her aunt in the American missionary compound of Kharpert, where the two remained until the second half of 1916. They then joined a small band of Armenian women trying to get back to their Black Sea towns to seek out their children. They paid Kurdish intermediaries to get them safely across the Dersim district to Erzinka (Erzincan), which had been occupied by the Russian army and Murad's Armenian volunteers. From Erzinka they made their way to Trebizond, where they waited anxiously for the Russians to occupy Ordu so that they could return home, but such hopes were dashed by the Russian

revolutions in 1917 and the retreat of the Russian armies from the occupied Ottoman territories. The narrative then continues].

We went to Trebizond in the fall of 1916. In 1917, there was a man from a village of Trebizond whose name was Puzant Fundukian. He asked to marry me. He had two brothers, Nerses and Haig or perhaps it was Aram. My husband was taking supplies to the soldiers or something like that. His younger brother was a wagon driver, and the other one was a store manager or something like that. My aunt was with me. I gave birth to a baby at the end of 1917. Then we had to move again. The men had a meeting and decided to defend the country and go to Erzinka and beyond to Agn and Arabkir. They wanted to defend the areas from which the Russian army was retreating. My aunt refused to come and left for Abkhazia. . . . But the Turks attacked us and we had to fall back. By the way, I have to say that there were Armenians who had come from other countries, too. There were Armenians from America, France, and so forth. When we were retreating toward Erzinka, we met them there. All of them were Turkish Armenians who had come from Europe and other places.

My brother-in-law rented a carriage for me and the baby while the men were to stay behind and defend us. But the coachman abandoned us. When I woke up, I saw that the baby had frozen to death. . . . Then I am not sure what happened, but I started walking, and there were some women with me. I certainly wasn't all alone. It got dark. I don't know how it happened, but I had already come a long way and I was tired when I met a soldier, an Armenian soldier. I cried: "Sir, let me sit behind you." He was probably retreating, too. So, we went and reached Erzinka. We hadn't had any sleep and felt numb. He left me in a house. I stayed there and woke up in the morning. Some women had gathered and were talking. They were preparing to leave, too. The Russians had retreated from Erzinka. The Armenians were left alone. The men were defending the front to give us a chance to get away without being massacred. . . . So, we lost each other.

In Erzerum, some Dashnaks told us to go in the direction of Kars. At one place, we were in a carriage. I don't remember who put us there and how it happened. There was a very sick child in the mother's lap. They probably helped us on the way. I don't remember it very well. Exhausted, we stayed near Kars for a few days and then we started looking for one another. I found my father-in-law. They were gathering together in Leninakan [then Alexandropol; now Gumri].

From there, I went to Batum with my father-in-law. My husband's cousin lived in a village in the Crimea. They were living there before the war. My father-in-law knew those places. We went there together. Later, my brother-in-law came back, but my husband didn't. My husband had been killed during the battle of Erzerum. . . . I wanted to come to America. We went to Simferopol. The ambassador of the Dashnaktsakans [the Armenian government in Erevan] was there. I went there and asked, but the man's wife explained: "Now, you cannot just go abroad so easily. We cannot help you." She was a very nice woman, but we came back disappointed.

Once I saw a dream that I had gone back to Ordu. Our house was in ruins on all sides with only one pillar standing. They told me: "This means that one person from your household is alive." And just about then I received a letter from an aunt saying that my brother was alive and in an orphanage in Constantinople. I was overjoyed.

Evnige concludes her life's story by telling of her move to Abkhazia where she taught in the schools of the Hamshentsi Armenian inhabitants; her failed attempts to join relatives in the United States; her relocating to Soviet Armenia, where she worked as a nurse and midwife; her marrying there but soon losing her husband in World War II. She immigrated with her daughter's family to the United States in 1980 and took great pride in the achievements of her physician grandsons, Hakob and David. "I am very glad that we came. I like it here a lot. When I go outside, my heart opens up. Trees, flowers. . . . It's very nice." Yet, though comforted, Evnige confesses that she can never forget the image of that emaciated child lying on the flattened breast of a dead mother and wondering, although it was probably hopeless, whether she should have or could have intervened to save the doomed child. That tormenting question went with Evnige to the grave.

A Compelling Legacy

These glimpses into the lives and tribulations of four girls born in Ordu are simply examples of the poignant personal narratives of survivors from throughout the Pontus and all of the Ottoman Empire. The name Khngeni—Incense Tree or Bush—was common among the Pontic Armenians. In time, little Khngeni came to be known also by the variant Khngouhi, which may be rendered as “source of incense.” Hence, let this essay be taken as a censer of *khung* being swung in memory and reverence of a generation that bore such great pain and sorrow with such great strength and dignity. It is a compelling legacy.